

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Gerry King



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Interviews Conducted and Edited by:
George Petershagen
Historian
Bureau of Reclamation



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents..... i

Statement of Donation..... iii

Editorial Convention..... v

Introduction..... vii

Oral History Interview..... 1

 Early Life..... 1

 Interest in Journalism..... 4

 Sespe Creek Project..... 5

 Encountering the Environmental Movement..... 6

 Impact of Local Politics..... 10

 Public Speaking..... 12

 Reclamation's Encounters with the Environmental
 Movement..... 14

 Joining Reclamation..... 16

 Stationed in the Planning Division..... 19

 Public Information Office..... 20

 Reclamation's Failure to See the Big Picture..... 23

 New Melones Project..... 24

 Water Development in California..... 27

 Water Rights..... 28

 The Politics of Water in California..... 30

 Central Valley Project Improvement Act..... 32

 Marin County..... 34

 Exchange Contractor..... 35

 A Passion..... 37

 Yuba County..... 38

 The Power of MWD..... 40

 Role of a Public Information Officer..... 44

 Mentors during Career at Reclamation..... 45

 Newspaper Clipping Service..... 47

 Floyd Dominy..... 49

 Gilbert Stamm..... 50

Robert Pafford.	51
Stewart Udall.	53
Jack Casserly.	54
Speech Writing.	55
Impact of Presidential Politics on Reclamation.	56
Lack of Support for Reclamation Projects.	57
Congressman George Miller.	59
California Politicians.	61
David Brower.	63

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Editorial Convention

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, (), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have

a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, the Bureau of Reclamation created a History Program. While headquartered in Denver, the History Program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's History Program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to:

Andrew H. Gahan
Historian
Environmental Compliance Division (84-53000)
Policy and Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
P. O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007

For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:
www.usbr.gov/history

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**Oral History Interview
Gerry King**

Petershagen: This is George Petershagen conducting an interview of Gerry King on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation. Today is September 1, 1994, and we're in the Mid-Pacific Region Offices of the Bureau on Cottage Way in Sacramento, [California]. Gerry retired from the Bureau as the Mid-Pacific Region Public Information Officer and has had an extensive career with the Bureau of Reclamation in the public information field.

Gerry, before we begin the real questions about your life and career, I wish you'd please acknowledge for me that you understand that we are tape recording this interview.

King: I understand we are tape recording, yes.

Petershagen: And that you did sign the Deed of Gift, giving up your rights to ownership of the interview and donating it to the Government of the United States.

King: Yes, that's right.

Early Life

Petershagen: Thank you. Then with that, let's proceed with this first side of Tape 1. My standard opening question is, Where and when were you born, please?

King: I was born January 31, 1935, in Pomeroy,

Washington–Washington State.

Petershagen: I see, and were you raised in Pomeroy?

King: No, I spent most of my young life in Moses Lake, smack in the midst of the Columbia Basin Project.¹

Petershagen: I see. Was your father a bureau employee? (King: No.) There was no relationship with the Columbia Basin Project?

King: No, except the dust that flew by the house every day while they were excavating the East High and West Low canals and that sort of thing.

Petershagen: You went to school then in Moses Lake?

King: Yes, I did.

Petershagen: Graduated from Moses Lake High School?

King: Yes, I did.

Petershagen: And what year would that have been?

¹ The Columbia Basin Project (CBP) is located in east central Washington and currently serves about 671,000 acres, or approximately 65 percent of the 1,029,000 acres originally authorized by Congress, in portions of Grant, Lincoln, Adams, and Franklin Counties, with some northern facilities located in Douglas County. These first half of project lands were developed primarily in the 1950's and 1960's, with some acreages being added sporadically until 1985. For more information, see Wm. Joe Simonds, "The Columbia Basin Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1998, /www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=88.

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- King: Oh, gracious, 1953.
- Petershagen: And where did you go to school from there?
- King: I spent a year, I guess, at the University of Montana in Missoula. It was called Montana State University at that time. And from there I wound up in the United States Navy.
- Petershagen: Why Montana?
- King: Because that was as far away as I could get from Moses Lake for the limited money I had at the time! (Chuckles) And it was a good school.
- Petershagen: And what did you do in the Navy?
- King: I was a Navy journalist. I was enlisted, of course. I learned a lot of what I knew about public information work, in the Navy. And then following that, I got out of the Navy, worked for a couple of newspapers in Southern California, and then for a water district in Southern California, which was United Water Conservation District. And at the time, they were proposing a Bureau of Reclamation project. That was my first contact with the bureau, and it was also my first contact with Jim Hart, who was the Public Information Officer at that time.
- Petershagen: Let me take you back a little ways here now, in what you described. When you joined the Navy, what made you want to become a journalist?

Interest in Journalism

King: Because I'd had an interest in that kind of thing in high school. I worked on the school paper and I was fairly fluent in english and not anywhere near so fluent in algebra.
(Laughter)

Petershagen: I think I understand that! In choosing Montana as a school to attend, did you announce yourself as a journalism major?

King: Yes.

Petershagen: So that was your goal when you started.

King: Yes, it was.

Petershagen: Then you mentioned Mr. Hart, who was the Public Information Officer for the bureau.

King: Yeah, Jim Hart was Public Information Officer for the Mid-Pacific Region—it was called Region II then—when I met him and that would have been in about 1962, I guess, '63 maybe. About 1963, I guess.

Petershagen: How long were you in the Navy, four years?

King: Four years, yeah.

Petershagen: I'm about as fluent in algebra, I guess, as you are, so I'm trying to add up the years as we go along here. So you were out of the Navy probably three or four years then, before you met Mr. Hart, correct?

King: Yeah, that's true.

Petershagen: And that was while you were working for . . .

King: United Water Conservation District of Ventura County.

Petershagen: And what was the project that they were proposing with the bureau?

Sespe Creek Project

King: The project was one on a little stream called Sespe Creek in the coastal hills of Ventura County. And it turns out that, at least from my perspective, a number of things came together on that project proposal, and those are the rise of Metropolitan Water District [MWD or Met] and the State Water Project. In California there was a *very* large argument over that going on at the time. But also the rise of, how should I say, intense emotional emphasis on endangered species. And the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, specifically the Audubon Society, and the Reclamation project all came together at one time.

And the issue there was the California condor. My first stand-up public appearance was as a Public Information Officer for United Water Conservation District, defending the Sespe Creek Project before a group of about, oh, eighty-five or ninety women, mostly from Santa Barbara and mostly members of the National Audubon Society. I'm fond of saying, I think it's true, that no public appearance has frightened me since. (Petershagen laughs) That was a trial

by fire, believe me.

Petershagen: I'm sure. You described these ladies as mostly members of the Audubon Society, I think, and I expected to hear you, when you said, "and mostly . . ." a couple of times say, "and mostly hostile to my point of view." I think that would be the case, right?

King: They were. They were. They were not, at least it was my perception, that they were not prepared to be reasonable at all about this. Whether they were wrong or not is, in my judgement, beside the point. It was, in fact, an expression of rising environmentalism. And they saw the project at that time as a threat to the California condor, of course, and as a threat to a philosophy which was burgeoning at the time.

Encountering the Environmental Movement

As I look back on that and remember those days and what was going on, none of the philosophies, and very little of the political action in that arena that was going on was anywhere near as sophisticated as it is today. In my judgement, the environmental movement over the intervening years has sacrificed energy and commitment in return for sophistication, which it now has. At that time, there was very little representation of environmentalism in the Legislature or in the Congress, or for that matter, in the White House that now exists today. I think that certainly the rise of that philosophy has had

a tremendous impact on the Bureau of Reclamation, and quite frankly, the bureau has not accommodated well to it. If you want to go into that subject further, I'd be more than happy to.

That was my introduction, really, to the Bureau of Reclamation, and although I didn't realize it at the time, what was coming, especially for me in defending Reclamation and water development projects in general.

Petershagen: As the spokesperson for this water district and on behalf of the project, you in effect became a spokesperson for the bureau, correct?

King: Ah, yes and no. The district hoped to get a bureau project. The district manager, a guy named William P. Price, Jr.—Bill Price had been an engineer with the bureau a number of years before coming to United. He'd worked in, oh, Colorado, and maybe Utah and Idaho, and he did some time in Denver as I remember. It was largely through his efforts and contacts that the bureau was drawn into devising and proposing the Sespe Creek Project. But for the most part, that project at the time was argued, was debated locally, and I think that United Water—I know certainly I had no idea what we were getting into at the time, when we took on not only the local politics in Ventura County in this whole thing, but also we took on the National Audubon Society—and our little project to store a couple hundred thousand acre feet of water was fairly small, became a

national, and for a short time at least, an international cause, and reached into strange and wondrous worlds indeed. We found ourselves involved with the National Science Foundation and with the . . . Oh, I want to say zoological, but that's not the right term, the ornithological community, which is extraordinary in the way they go about things. It's a community that is very strongly dedicated to their purposes, and in my judgement, at least has a tendency to concern themselves more with their internal workings than the outside world.

I remember an individual that was involved in that controversy. His name was Alden Miller, and Alden Miller was an ornithologist at the University of California at Berkeley and was very, very potent in the scientific community. And he published a small document, a quarterly, I believe, called *The Condor*. And there was, we *heard*—a lot of this I don't know from personal experience—but we heard that there was some struggle going on within an organization called the Cooper Society. I do know that Miller was working diligently to make *The Condor*, his publication, also the official publication of the Cooper Society. Miller sat on the Board of Directors of the National Science Foundation and reviewed National Science Foundation grants for ornithological studies by at least United States people, for their studies throughout the world. And we were told that if you were an ornithologist and you wanted a grant from the United States Government to study birds anywhere in the world, you had

best not say anything really disparaging about either Alden Miller, his publication, or the California Condor, or for that matter I guess, his politics within the Cooper Society.

I guess the point of all this is that poor little old United Water Conservation District in Ventura County had absolutely no idea what it was getting into (Chuckles) when it took on this sort of thing. And the district was overmatched. We could never have won. But it was kind of a surrealistic world, because as it appeared to us, the total battle was conducted right in Ventura County. A portion of the county and a portion of United's tax base, notably the city of Oxnard and the area around Camarillo, the Oxnard Plain, was about to join Metropolitan Water District to firm up their water supplies. Ventura County was a water-short area. And there was a debate going on over that, and the Sespe Creek Project became embroiled in that because it became a question of who got to use whose tax base for which purpose.

So there was an intense battle for a couple of years and finally there was a local referendum. The condor and the portion of United that was being promoted for membership in Metropolitan Water District, which was going to be quite costly, was all mixed together. In early 1966, I guess it was, maybe late 1965. At any rate, we lost the local election by thirty-one votes out of about 44,000 cast. (Petershagen: Wow!) We had a recount and the issue was so

volatile that at least I thought it was necessary to call the local police department and have police standing by while the recount was going on. It took two or three days for United's Board of Directors to get clear through it. As it turned out, we had, oh, maybe about two dozen votes that the board ruled should have been counted differently. It was almost evenly split, tilted a little bit one way or another, I don't remember which. But a few of the "yes" votes became "no" votes, and a few of the "no" votes became "yes" votes. But it showed once again the usual futility of recounts on elections like that, with that large a number of people involved.

Petershagen: Let's review the issues now if we could, just to be real sure. Obviously the California condor and the preservation of both the bird and its habitat, I'm sure was an issue. (King: Yes, it was.) Then you mentioned, probably as a subset of that, some of the politics within some of the organizations having to do with the various aspects of this.

Impact of Local Politics

King: Yeah, there was intense local politics involved.

Petershagen: Then there obviously was this issue about tax base and so forth, regarding both the conservation district and the Metropolitan Water District and who belonged to who, and how that would sort out. Was there anything in this that was just plain the thing we call NIMBY now—the no-growth, not-in-

my-back-yard kind of a phenomenon?

King: Interestingly enough, there was a suggestion at the time. It came from the Audubon Society, and as I remember, it came from Alexander Sprunt who was . . . I'm not sure what his position was. I think he's an ornithologist. He was midway up the ladder in Audubon at the time. At any rate, he suggested that it might not be a bad idea, certainly would be a good thing for the condor, and it might not be a bad idea for the folks in Ventura County if they just fenced off the county. I think he was dead serious.

There was at the time a notion going around that maybe California had already grown too much, and maybe there ought to be some immigration control into California, especially Southern California. And I thought at the time, and a number of people in Ventura County thought at the time, that that was a somewhat presumptuous suggestion. But it's a little different play on the NIMBY thing. And I once gave a speech in Los Angeles to—well, when I worked for the district—and I once referred to that part of Ventura County as "Los Angeles' backyard." But the Angelinos, I think, were not all that interested in what was happening in their backyard. Subsequently they became very interested in it, but they weren't really interested at that time.

Petershagen: Now you mentioned that it was through this experience you came to know Jim Hart. I

started out asking you how you became a journalist and so forth, and my impression was then that your focus was on the written word, but you found yourself as a public speaker at the same time. (King: Yes, I did.) Did you have any sort of public speaking background to draw on? (King: Nope.) No debate team in high school or anything like that?

Public Speaking

King: No, not really. Well, no, it was (Chuckles) I just stood up and did it.

Petershagen: Were you a volunteer? (Laughter) Or did the district manager just say, "Get out there and go for it."

King: Well, the district had hired a public relations man. His name was Arthur Renwick, and he had come from Los Angeles. And the district hired him to do that, and I kind of worked as his assistant. I don't know what Art—his nickname was "Duke"—I don't know that he taught me a lot about public speaking, but I don't think he would complain too much about my saying that he was a good deal more sophisticated than I was at that time, and he could see the bullets coming. (Laughter) I don't think that he maliciously did that, but it was necessary for somebody to go out and defend the project and defend the district. The manager, Bill Price, essentially it was his job, but he could not be there, could not do it, and quite frankly in those kinds of arenas, was not at all comfortable. I was too young and dumb

to know any better at the time, so I went out and did it.

As I look back on it, it was a great experience for me. I learned a tremendous lot in a very short period of time about the politics of water and environment and natural resources in general, and also a great deal about California. At that time we regarded Sacramento and Northern California as simply a different world. And except for the fact that we hoped to get some water from Northern California through the State Water Project, which no one really understood, I think, at that time. Other than that, the politics of the things that were going on, at the state level especially, in Sacramento, were only of vague interest to us. And in many ways, we regarded the bureau as the same way.

That was near the end of what I like to call the "old" bureau. Floyd Dominy was still commissioner, and the bureau wanted and needed a strong public push in order to justify the beginnings of a project study or project undertaking and expected the local people to defend and promote the project, and the bureau would come in and do it. So in some ways the bureau was something of a vague entity to us, certainly it was to me. They were doing studies and doing things that engineers do, but there was not a great deal of bureau effort to defend the project. They did come down with the presentation of their study material, their reports. They came down and participated in the public release of that, and we staged a nice show

for that. But other than that, there wasn't a great deal of public information activity, although as the whole thing drew closer to a local resolution, of course they began to pay more and more interest. But they never tried to influence things locally, other than to gain acceptance of the reports that they were offering.

Petershagen: Let's stop here and we'll turn the tape over.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Petershagen: Gerry, as we closed out the first side of the tape, you were discussing the beginnings of your career as a Public Information Officer in the water business. Is there anything further that needs to be said about that experience in Ventura?

King: Probably not. I think at the time, as I look back on it, we certainly, in that little water district off in Southern California, we had really no idea of the impact on the bureau that that argument was having. We just had no idea. And the other side of that is that the bureau, as I look back, didn't tell us. And I don't think that the bureau fully recognized what was happening to this little water district it was trying to help.

Reclamation's Encounters with the Environmental Movement

Petershagen: I think you almost anticipated my next question. I guess I wanted to say, "Well, did they know?" Is this maybe the bureau's first

introduction to this sort of thing too?

King: Well, it wasn't the bureau's first introduction to it, certainly. I think there were those people in the bureau who could see what was coming at the time. Heavens, there were proposals to demolish Hoover Dam, and numbers of rising other things. But there was also a larger contingent in the bureau who, how should I say, they were absolutely convinced it would never happen. Nobody is likely to ever listen to those little old ladies in tennis shoes. And I think that that, in part, that was a reflection of the feelings of the bureau's constituents. I know that there are individuals who were important at that time, and who are important today in the farming communities in the San Joaquin Valley who are still convinced, all evidence to the contrary, they're still convinced that pretty soon there'll be another conservative elected and all of this will go away. It's not going to happen that way.

Over those years, especially during the early years that I was with the bureau, it took a very proprietary, almost paternal interest in bureau projects. Never mind that the projects were created to assist the local areas, and in the case of the C-V-P [Central Valley Project]² and the Colorado River,

² The Central Valley Project, one of the Nation's major water conservation developments, extends from the Cascade Range in the north to the semi-arid but fertile plains along the Kern River in the south. Initial features of the project were built primarily to protect the

nominally, the whole state of California, as well as Arizona and a number of other states. They were regarded as *bureau* projects, more than as California projects. So that approach or that attitude or those concepts, of course, are now waning very rapidly in the bureau, but they were very prevalent at that time.

Petershagen: Alright, let's continue with your personal career, and I'm sure as we go along we'll come back to some of these very same issues. How did you actually come to work for the bureau? Did Mr. Hart approach you, or did you approach him?

Joining Reclamation

King: I was looking to expand my career, you know, and to move up. In the latter stages of the Sespe Creek issue, Jim was a fairly frequent visitor, and the bureau had about that time launched San Luis development. They were in fact looking for a public information type. So there was some conversation between Jim and I several times, and finally he invited me to, if I was really interested, to—let me think—to fill out a resumé and send it to the Administrative Officer in Los Banos at that time, a guy

Central Valley from crippling water shortages and menacing floods, but the CVP also improves Sacramento River navigation, supplies domestic and industrial water, generates electric power, conserves fish and wildlife, creates opportunities for recreation and enhances water quality. For more information, see Eric A. Stene, "Central Valley Project Overview," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=253.

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

named David Raymond. He died before that project was completed, but Dave Raymond got my first application and before it could be processed, the notion that the San Luis Unit³ needed a Public Information Office got squashed by somebody.

And for whatever reason, Hart felt that I had some qualifications for this kind of work. So he convinced the regional director at the time, a man named Robert J. Pafford, Jr.⁴, that I should be hired on. And as a practical matter, I was hired not into the Public Information Office, although I never sat anyplace else, but I was hired into the Planning Division on a TAPER, temporary appointment pending establishment of a register, I believe. So I was hired into the Planning Division and worked there on a TAPER for, I don't know, three or four years, I guess. And (Chuckles) I'm not sure

³ Authorized by the San Luis Act in June 1960 (Public Law 86-488), it is jointly operated by the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources. The principal purpose of the San Luis Unit is irrigation water supply for almost 1 million acres of prime farmland in central California. For more information, see Robert Autabee, "San Luis Unit, West San Joaquin Division: Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=109.

⁴ Robert J. Pafford served as regional Director for Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region from 1963 to 1973. Mr. Pafford also participated in Reclamation's oral history project. See, Robert J. Pafford, Oral History Interview, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation oral history interview conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, in Sacramento, California, in 1994, edited by Brit Allan Storey, further edited and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, 2017, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

whether I was . . . At the time I was unsure whether I was actually an employee of the Bureau of Reclamation or not. But I had been here two or three years before I was actually hired on and actually moved in. A position was opened in the Public Information Office, and I remember the subject came up at lunch once with Pafford. Pafford was a most direct individual. I quipped that I'd been here three years or so and I hadn't even been hired yet, and he looked up from his hamburger and french fries in the cafeteria across the way and said, "You got your goddamned pay didn't you?" (Laughter) And I had to admit that that was true. I was being paid.

But in that regard, I'm sure that the administration of the bureau has not changed significantly over the years. Its like almost any federal agency, certainly, and most state agencies. I would imagine that it's necessary to utilize the regulations and the rules and the procedures in whatever manner seems necessary to get a job done. And the bureau at that time needed public information help. It needed to do a *tremendous* lot of explaining. And Pafford understood that, and so did Hart, for that matter.

Petershagen: So with that hiring, you came to Sacramento (King: Yes.) rather than going to Los Banos.

King: Yeah, I came to Sacramento.

Petershagen: At what place on the pay scale were you hired in? Were you on a wage scale?

King: No, G-S scale. I was hired as a GS-11.

Petershagen: And then if you were on this TAPER in the Planning Department, your position must have been some sort of planner, I would assume. Or did they have to provide you a classification under those circumstances?

Stationed in the Planning Division

King: Well, eventually there was a classification . . . I had my job in planning, although I never did anything directly for the Planning Division, which irritated some folks up there.

Petershagen: That anticipated my next question!

King: But I had a position that was . . . I don't remember what it was, but it was somewhat analogous to what I was actually doing to make a living. I always got high marks in the biannual evaluations.

Petershagen: Now you mentioned a little bit of irritation within the Planning Department. Sometimes we do get kind of blinded within our little communities. Was there any resentment or serious irritation by any of the planners toward you?

King: Ah (Pauses), I think there probably was.

Petershagen: You *were* somewhat of a stranger that was taking up a seat and a paycheck that could have gone to one of their own brothers, whoever that might be.

King: Oh, yes. The bureau at that time was still a very close-knit and a very clannish organization. The bureau did not give its trust to new individuals readily, and especially interlopers that were moving into areas that were almost sacred. Planning was probably as good a place as any for me, however, because if I'd been moved into Design and Construction, I might not have survived. It took about three years before I was accepted as a Reclamation devotee, and someone who could be trusted.

Petershagen: Is that because of you, or would anybody have been treated that way?

King: Anybody who was doing what I was doing would have been treated that way.

Petershagen: That's where I was going. Because you were in the Public Information Office?

Public Information Office

King: Yeah, because I was doing public information work, and there was, at that time, a notion that real men didn't do that kind of thing. Not only that, to make or write a speech or put out a news release that re-rationalized something or used a rationale that was different than had been used in the Project Planning Report, that was not only work that was not done by real men, it was cheating a little bit. And it was a common reaction. The first speech I wrote for the bureau was shortly after I got here. And it

had to do with Auburn Dam,⁵ which was just getting cranked up at that time. Auburn had been authorized in November or December of '65.

Petershagen: You don't mess around, do you Gerry? You broke in with this project in Ventura, you come to work for the bureau and immediately start with the Auburn Dam! (Laughs)

King: Yeah. And as I remember, I wrote the speech for an engineer whose name was John Morgan. As I remember, John was leading the effort on Auburn at that time, and the issues over Auburn and the American River and the diversions were already starting to boil up. And John was to, as I remember, was to make an opening statement at some public meeting or something like that. And so I wrote it for him, gave it to him, and his reaction was, "This is trash." (Comment obscured by laughter) So that was my introduction to the way things were done in the Bureau of Reclamation, and I pushed to work really hard on that presentation, because I wanted

⁵ Auburn Dam was the primary feature of the Central Valley Project's Auburn-Folsom South Unit. Authorized in 1965, the dam was designed as a concrete arch structure 700 feet in height with crest length of 4,000 feet. Auburn Dam has yet to be constructed due to seismic and environmental concerns. For more information, see Jedidiah S. Rogers, "Auburn Dam, Auburn-Folsom Unit, American River Division: Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2009, www.usbr.gov/history/ProjectHistories/Central%20Valley%20Project-Auburn%20Dam%20D2.pdf.

to make a good impression. John threw it away, as I remember, and took out his own note cards that he had used for a presentation on various things a number of times.

It wasn't too long after that, maybe six months, that I wrote another speech, and this one was for an assistant secretary of Interior. His name was Kenneth Holum, and he was coming out to speak on, it was at Sonora, I believe, but the subject had to do with New Melones⁶ and the Stanislaus River, which was boiling up at that time, too. And again, John Morgan was the planner. He was a senior planner, a gruff, crusty old guy. But he was in charge of that, too. So I wrote the speech for Ken Holum, and took it to John for review, and it got the same reaction. (Laughter) He says, "People already know this. There's no point in sending this off to him. It doesn't give them any information."

The speech had something to do with water being more valuable than gold in California, even though California is the Golden State, and a bunch of that stuff. So under the circumstances, I brought the speech back, and at that time it wasn't John

⁶ In 1944, Congress authorized the construction of New Melones Dam to prevent flooding of 35,000 downstream acres of agricultural lands and communities. The 1962 Flood Control Act included irrigation, power, wildlife and fishery enhancement, recreation, and water quality as reasons for construction. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began building New Melones in 1966, completing the dam in 1978 and the spillway and powerhouse in 1979; the Corps then transferred the project to the Bureau of Reclamation.

who was going to give the speech, it was a politico from Washington. So I probably didn't know at the time how close I was to getting booted out the door, but I was stubborn and Jim Hart sided with me. We made a couple of small changes and sent the speech to Washington. Subsequently, word came back that Holum, at least, thought it was great because it had more of what he figured was useful in public relations and a lot less statistics about how high the dam was, how big the turbine was, and that sort of thing. He wasn't speaking to a water district. He was talking to people about the effect of the project on their community.

Petershagen: And that was John Morgan's objections to your speech-writing style, I'll say it that way, was that it lacked the technical flavor that he would put in there, that sort of thing.

Reclamation's Failure to See the Big Picture

King: Yeah. And the common bureau speech at that time was a recitation of facts and figures and, very frankly, things that would impress the engineers. You know, it's their life. They understand how to make things work, and they measure the quality of their work by the output that comes from it. That was fairly typical. Hart and I used to joke that the standard speech title at the time was "What's New with the Central Valley Project in 1969," or "1970," (Laughs) or whatever. And it was always the same kind of recitation.

I think that was part of the bureau's

"failure," if you will, to accommodate itself to the rising philosophical and political forces that were occurring not only here in California, although California was the leader, but nationally, at the time. I think the effects of that are still being felt in the bureau. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Petershagen: Since you mentioned Auburn, that must have consumed a good part of your career with the bureau, I would think. Did a day go by without discussion on the Auburn Project?

King: Not that I remember. (Both chuckle) Auburn . . . Well, there was a time when Auburn slid back and New Melones came to the fore; notably when Mark Dubois had himself chained to the tree.

Petershagen: Did that catch you off guard?

King: His action?

Petershagen: Not necessarily the specific act, but that he or somebody like him would try that sort of a headline publicity stunt?

New Melones Project

King: Oh, yes and no. At that time, the project belonged to the Corps, of course, and the reservoir was filling, and there was a battle going on between the state of California and the United States over who was going to run the thing. You remember Jerry Brown [Edmund G. Brown, Jr.] was governor, and

the first lawyer was running the Department of Water Resources. His name was Ronald Robie. He's now a judge, and he's a shark. Robie irritated a lot of people at the time, but in a lot of ways he did a lot of good things for California, and a lot of that was him making use of the controversy surrounding New Melones. I think Robie could see the heavy hand of the feds coming, and he wanted to do what he could to prevent complete federal control of California's water supply. As a practical matter, the feds were probably already in control of it, but he wanted to help so he made use of the environmental controversy over New Melones to that end.

So it was hot. New Melones had been to the polls a couple of times, went to the Supreme Court, what, three times? The Environmental Defense Fund was deeply involved in it, the Sierra Club and . . . I guess the principal environmentalist organization was Environmental Defense Fund. Tom Graff, who in my judgement is a genius as an environmentalist lawyer. (Chuckles) He was making life real tough for the bureau and the Corps at the time. I think that at the time Tom was sharpening up his legal teeth, and he used that project to do it. His successes I think can be measured in the way not only New Melones, but in the way the entire Central Valley Project is being managed today.

Petershagen: In these joint sorts of projects, like New Melones where, say, the Corps builds the dam and then turns it over to the bureau for

operation, when there is this kind of a hassle going on in the media and amongst the public, it would seem to me easy for the bureau to take the option to say, "Well, let's take a hands-off policy and let the Corps suffer with this for a while." What *was* going on here in the halls on Cottage Way? (King laughs) What sort of discussions were you involved in?

King: Well, in that instance, the capability of the organizations from a political standpoint, really, actually changed from moment to moment. Keep in mind that in those days we still thought we were in competition with the Corps. And they, of course, thought they were in competition with us. But with New Melones, it was, how should I say, it was authorized and went forward on the so-called Folsom Formula, where the Corps builds and then the project is folded into the Central Valley Project in order to hold down the cost of the water supply and so on.⁷ So the Corps build New Melones, because when the projects were coming up, Auburn and New Melones were coming up at the same time, and it was pretty obvious that the bureau was going to have its hands full with Auburn. As it turned out (Chuckles), it was more than the bureau could hold at once.

⁷ Developed in 1949, the Folsom Formula essentially stated the "multiple-purpose dams are the responsibility of the Bureau of Reclamation, and dams and other works exclusively for flood control are the responsibility of the Corps of Engineers." For more information, see "What is the Folsom Formula," *Reclamation Era*, 36 (January 1950): 15.

But New Melones had been initially authorized under the Corps' process as a flood control project. And so in dividing things up, the Corps wound up building New Melones. And for the construction of the project it was pretty much a Corps job, and we pretty much stayed away from it. Beyond that, we had our hands full with the inclusion of the project in C-V-P and continually having to re-justify the project on the grounds of water and power need because a principal attack on New Melones was based on the notion that neither the water or the power from the project was needed.

Petershagen: Let me stop you right there so we can change the tape.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 3.⁸

Petershagen: Gerry, I'm sorry I had to interrupt you there in mid-sentence just about, when you were talking about water sources and supplies and so forth. So maybe you could continue there.

Water Development in California

King: Okay, I guess the point I was making is that the remaining water that is physically

⁸ Tape 2 was destroyed during the copying process. The missing topics include completion of the discussion of New Melones and other controversial projects and the opening of a discussion of undeveloped water resources in California. [Ed.]

developable in California is mostly in northwest California. It would be in the Klamath and Eel river system. I don't know that the Mad has got much water in it, the Russian's got a little. Principal water resources remaining up in that area are the Klamath, the Lower Trinity, and the Eel [rivers], really. The discharge from northwest California to the ocean these days is 20-23 million acre feet. It probably constitutes seventy-five percent, if not more, of the remaining water in California that could conceivably, physically be developed and diverted to conventional uses.

The fact is that much of that water is now "protected," if you will, under Wild and Scenic River status, and if not Wild and Scenic Rivers, then certainly local and statewide, perhaps even nationwide resistance to the construction of dams that would be necessary to collect and divert the water. I think it's logical and reasonable to identify that water as water that is committed to environmental purposes.

Petershagen: If you're building a spreadsheet, so to speak.

Water Rights

King: Yeah. And I would base that on a rather ancient notion that whatever resource is available, it belongs to that group or that interest or that force or power or whatever that can prevent its use by someone else. I think that's a reasonable definition of ownership. And it's also the basis for my saying that a water right in California—water

rights are, in my judgement, pretty good for keeping track of water or where it should be and who should be using it, but I think the term "water right" has long since become a misnomer. I don't care how strong your rights are, if you can be prevented from using the water, you no longer have a "right" to it. And these days, it is relatively easy to prevent any diverter from using a water supply. In my judgement, the only thing that *protects* a water supply is community initiative and political activity.

In this regard, I have to give a very large dose of credit to the environmental community. The reason for that is, whether one agrees with their concepts and their actions or not, in my judgement, is beside the point—the fact is, that they are energetic. They tend to be of one mind, if not single-minded. And when there is a requirement for something to be done they use any argument to support their principles. As a result, in California, as nowhere else, really, they have been very, very successful. I think the Central Valley Project Improvement Act [CVPIA]⁹ is an example

⁹ Public Law 102-575, the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, became law October 30, 1992. The act contained numerous titles, each of which is given a separate name. Title 34 of the act is the Central Valley Project Improvement Act or CVPIA. The act's purpose is to: protect, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats in the Central Valley and Trinity River basin; address project impacts on fish and wildlife; improve project operational flexibility; increase expanded use of voluntary water transfers and improve water conservation; contribute to California's efforts to protect
(continued...)

of their successes. I think C-V-P-I-A and Central Valley Project and the bureau are being, how should I say, used, manipulated, whatever, for numbers of other purposes.

The Politics of Water in California

As a matter of fact, I think the environmental movement is being used and manipulated for other purposes. I know that many (Chuckles) of those folks would be irritated at me for saying that, but I think the situation is that they cannot rely on their achievements to be long-lasting. I just don't see how they can do that. And C-V-P-I-A makes an interesting point, and I don't think it's lost on a lot of people, that it's possible to use the Congress to make a change in a local controversy, to change the character or change the direction of it. The fact is that this has been going on in California for a very long time, certainly since the early part of the century. But it's always been relatively quiet and fairly polite. It's no longer polite, and it's no longer quiet.

I think that it's possible to change that law in the same fashion that you will soon see changes in the Endangered Species Act. You're going to see changes in the Clean Water Act. You're going to see changes in the Resource Recovery Act and on and on as these things come up. And it's going to be

⁹(...continued)

Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta; achieve reasonable balances among competing demands for use of Central Valley Project Water.

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

easier and easier to accomplish. I think it will be accomplished, as it has in the past, by people who suddenly feel themselves put upon by these kinds of legislation, feel themselves threatened. I think that there's going to be a lot of water interests in the West, certainly, that are going to look at C-V-P-I-A and say, "It could happen to me." I think the people in Washington and Oregon and Idaho are soon going to say, "It's happening in California, now it's happening to us. Where's it going to go next? And how far is it going to go here?"

There was a proposal by the Fish and Wildlife Service a short while ago to restore the salmon run in the San Joaquin River under C-V-P-I-A, that would require . . . The water that's diverted at Friant Dam to the south is actually water rights water, and it belongs to the exchange contractors. In order to accomplish that proposal, *that* water rights water would have to be released into the San Joaquin River at Friant; the folks down the Friant-Kern Canal would be largely shut off from; that's about a half a million acre feet of water. And the diversions of water rights water out of the San Joaquin River between Friant and Vernalis would have to largely be stopped. There was a public meeting in Hanford, I believe. There were 1,800 people there, and they were universally opposed to it.

I attended a meeting just earlier this week to discuss the scoping of environmental impact statement, or environmental impact documentation, on the

purchase of, I think it's only 32,000 acre feet of water over a period of ten or fifteen years, from Assemblyman Rusty Areias. That's C-V-P water. It also happens to be water rights water. And Metropolitan Water District [Metropolitan Water District of Southern California] wants to purchase it, and they're willing to pay a handsome sum for it, 200 bucks an acre foot.

There were 500 people at that meeting at Santa Nella Village. They were outraged. They told Rusty Areias, who was there, exactly what they thought of him, and none of it was complimentary. They suggested that Metropolitan Water District go elsewhere, that they didn't want anything to do with them. Out of the 500 people that were there, they must have had at least forty or fifty speakers: the mayor of each and every little community in the Central California Irrigation District, the entire Board of Directors of Central California Irrigation District *and* the comptroller, *and* their chief engineer! (Chuckles) They had the presidents of the boards of directors of all the exchange contractors. There was only one person that had even anything at all, even the smallest thing nice to say about that whole thing, and that was the M-W-D guy that was there, taking the heat.

Central Valley Project Improvement Act

I think that there will eventually be a very, very strong reaction to C-V-P-I-A from the San Joaquin Valley. Whether they

will carry the day or not, I have no idea, but I believe that that reaction is coming. One of the purposes of C-V-P-I-A is, in fact, to allow the purchase of water supply from individual C-V-P water users, allow the purchase of their water by Metropolitan and other urban areas.

It's spelled out, and this is the first attempt at that. I would predict that it's going to be held up in procedure and probably in the courts for quite a while. From a public relations standpoint, it may eventually prove to be simply a smokescreen: While the attention of many folks are pinned on this item, the Federal Framework Group will get itself together, and Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] will begin to run the Delta, as they will be on December 15 of this year. E-P-A is going to dictate how much water has to come into the Delta. The Water Resources Control Board has already agreed to reallocate water rights water, reallocate the responsibility for supplying water rights water to the Delta for endangered species and suitable water quality—the maintenance requirements that E-P-A regards as necessary for whatever purpose.

I know that the bureau is surveying—I think the guys at Water Augmentation Proposals—the bureau is surveying every possible area where it can generate further water supplies, this also under C-V-P-I-A. The largest amount of water that the bureau thinks it can generate is via, the euphemism

I think is "demand reduction," or "irrigation demand reduction." I've seen one figure on a bureau publication that shows they can reduce irrigation demands, among other ways, by simply buying the land, or something called "deficit irrigation." They can reduce it by almost seventeen million acre feet a year, which is approximately half the total water use in California.

The bureau diverts about six or seven million acre feet a year into the San Joaquin Valley, and probably diverts another two million acre feet a year or so in the Sacramento Valley. Most of that admittedly goes to irrigation. But seventeen million acre feet probably (Pauses) comes close to being the entire water use for *all* purposes between Redding and Bakersfield. It may be possible to extend that act [CVPIA] and take some of that water out of, say, the Imperial Valley, on grounds that they're using bureau water, and thereby reduce the water use in Imperial County out of the Colorado River, make more water available from the Colorado [River] to M-W-D, and thereby reduce M-W-D's draft on the Delta and Northern California.

Marin County

That approach in fact has been used, only in the reverse order: It was used to save Marin County from going dry in 1976-77, when there was a pipeline across the San Rafael, along the San Rafael Bridge. The good folks in Marin County have not

admitted it to this day, but the fact of the matter is that they were drinking Hoover Dam water. And they were getting it at the sufferance of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, who increased their demand on the Colorado, paid extra pumping costs among other things, and allowed their supply to be backed into the San Joaquin Valley and clear up to the Delta, so that Marin County could have enough for their community showers.

They cried their eyes out, but they had deliberately set out to avoid having enough water supply in Marin County on grounds that it would prevent growth. As it turned out, there were a lot of people who wanted to go over there and live with those folks. It was a nice place to live, and they just assumed that the water was going to be there. It didn't prevent the growth, and when the drought came, they didn't have enough water. There are a few, very few, but there are a few people in Marin County who are still embarrassed about that little circumstance today.

Petershagen: Earlier you used the term "exchange contractor" a couple of times. (King: Yeah.) Can you explain that please?

Exchange Contractor

King: The exchange contractors are those contractors generally on the lower San Joaquin River in the Los Banos-Gustine-

Firebaugh area who traded their water rights water. And this is water rights water that goes far, far back into California history. Some of those people are direct descendants of Miller and Lux, who created the Mendota Pool and at one time were the arbiters of water management in that part of the San Joaquin Valley.

The exchange contractors exchanged their water rights water at Friant, so that that water could be diverted into the Friant-Kern Canal and go to Kern County. In return for that, or in exchange for their water rights water, they were guaranteed, it comes up to . . . oh, I don't remember, it's about a million acre feet a year, maybe less than that. But that water gets to them from Shasta, Sacramento River, via the Delta-Mendota Canal, and some of its distributed out of the canal, but a lot of it is distributed, as has been done for many, many years there, out of Mendota Pool, where Delta-Mendota, of course, discharges. They are very jealous of that, and they don't pay for that water. I think they get a few extra acre feet here and there that they do in fact pay for, just because it's to their advantage to buy some. But the people in Kern County pay for that water. Without that kind of an exchange, the Central Valley Project would not work. It just simply wouldn't function. There's not enough water in the San Joaquin River at Friant to make it function that way.

Petershagen: What is there, or . . . Let me say it this way. How does Gerry King know all this stuff?

King: (Chuckles) I lived with it for nineteen years.

Petershagen: What have you been doing since you left the Bureau of Reclamation?

King: Oh, I . . .

Petershagen: I ask that because I know this is more than just a passing interest with you.

A Passion

King: Oh yeah, it's more than just a *passion*, actually. (Both chuckle) Well, when I left the bureau, I went to work for a while with the engineering firm in Oklahoma, The Benham Group. Benham was interested in securing some bureau contracts, and they were also interested in doing some more work in California. So they hired me, not to be a salesman, but to devise ways that they could develop their clientele in California. And along in the midst of that, working for them, I was hired by, through them, I was hired by Glen-Colusa Irrigation District [GCID] up at Willows. And G-C-I-D was in the midst of a crisis, really, that had arisen over the simple renewal by the Corps of Engineers of a dredging permit to dredge their intake channel.

G-C-I-D was being accused of pumping salmon, salmon smolts, through their pumps, out onto the rice fields where the little critters died. There was a concerted effort by, notably, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to deny Glen-Colusa that

dredging permit, and thereby shut off their water supply; 140,000 acres of rice land. They were very nearly successful. I worked on their, how should I say, public relations campaign, I guess, or public information campaign. We devised a . . . Oh, I think calling it a strategy gives it more than it really should have. We devised some approaches to dealing with the problem. What it boiled down to was to activate the local community and explain to them just exactly what was at risk, put on the largest public meeting that had ever occurred in Willows. There were something over 500 people there. That's a pretty good show in Willows. And eventually the Fish and Wildlife Service backed off some. The state of California backed off some. There is now a new fish screen being built, *with* federal help, and for the moment at least, the problem is diminished if not gone away completely. I don't think it's gone away completely. And I did some work for G-C-I-D in that little thing. Along in the midst of that, I left Benham. I've been an off-and-on consultant since that time.

Yuba County

And now I write water stories for a tiny foothill newspaper called the *Rabbit Creek Journal*. It comes out weekly and I write a column a week for them, mostly aimed at trying to "sensitize," if you will, the good folks of Yuba County to the danger that their water supply is in. In my judgement, they're going . . . Maybe I should

back up a bit.

Yuba County and the Yuba River has the last surplus water supply that's actually under control in California. It's only a couple hundred thousand acre feet, but it's there. In my judgement, that makes it a target because it is under control. You can identify it. You can measure it. You can release it or withhold it. I think that the good folks in Yuba County have got some decisions to make, and I think they'd better make them in a hurry, because when the Water Resources Control Board sits and starts to allocate water rights, or the responsibilities among water rights holders, to meet the needs of the Delta smelt in the word according to E-P-A, I think they're going to look very, very hard at the Yuba River, because Yuba is a small county. It's not politically potent, and there's a nice batch of water there that can be had for very little. I think Yuba County should sell part of that water, and I think they should sell it to the most powerful friend that they can find. (Chuckles) And I keep trying to tell them that.

Petershagen: And who would that most powerful friend be?

King: Metropolitan Water District. Met is out looking for water in large part because I think they can see what's going to happen to the State Water Project right along with everybody else. They have gobs and gobs of money. There's fourteen million people

down there, and Met is responsible for making sure that most of them have enough to drink and enough to wash their babies in.

Petershagen: Once again, Gerry, I have to ask you to stop. I'm sorry.

King: (Chuckles) Okay.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 3.
BEGINNING SIDE 2, TAPE 3.

Petershagen: Gerry, as with the other tapes, I had to interrupt you in mid-thought before . . .
(King: That's alright.) So would you please continue with the thought you had on the Yuba River and M-W-D?

The Power of MWD

King: Okay, M-W-D is, by anybody's estimation, the most powerful force in California water. Their capability and authority probably almost certainly far exceeds even the State of California in that arena. And the reasons that they're so powerful are obvious. They've got 14 million, plus or minus, souls that depend on them, and on whom, more or less, they can depend. They have two things. They have a *desperate* need for a water supply, for a reliable, good-quality water supply; and they have money by the bucketsful.

I am told that during the recent six-year drought, about 1991 or so, the General Manager of Metropolitan Water District was

walking around the state of California with a \$30 million check in his pocket, buying water anyplace that he could under virtually any circumstances. Met is largely responsible for the State Water Bank, and is almost certainly responsible for setting the prices that were involved in the State Water Bank.

Selling water to the Metropolitan Water District is not a universal panacea for everybody. And I would not recommend it to a lot of people, but I would recommend it to Yuba County on grounds that if Yuba County is going to continue the use of that water supply to grow rice and prunes and almonds and whatever then it's going to have to defend it. Yuba County is not in a position to mount a really strong defense. They can hire a couple of lawyers, but no way can they hire twenty matches for the federal government or fifteen or twenty from the state of California.

So then in order to do that, in order to defend themselves, they're going to have to set up a situation whereby someone else's water supply, and preferably a *powerful* someone else's water supply, is partly dependent upon the reliability of Yuba County's supply. And I would suggest, *have* suggested, that one of the ways to do that is to store water from year-to-year in Yuba County and exact a price for storing that water and then exact an additional price for when the water is actually called. And the current going price for that kind of water is

\$200 an acre foot.

Metropolitan Water District is fully prepared to pay for it. We're talking about exactly the same kind of water that they're trying to get out of Rusty Areias. The only difference is that Rusty's water has already been pumped at the point where Metropolitan would take it. As a practical matter, that's not quite the way it would work, but that's the way it would look out in the public. I think that Yuba County has 100,000-150,000 acre feet of water that it could sell on a year-to-year basis, or some modification of year-to-year, and make a couple hundred dollars an acre foot out of the only really truly valuable resource that exists in that county. They've got some real problems coming up, in addition to their economic problems. There's some timber in Yuba County, but it's about to be occupied by the Marbled Murrelet, not to mention the Southern Spotted Owl and a few things like that. They have Bullard's Bar Project. It's a fine water project.

They have been described as "water rich," and, by comparison, in some ways they are. Just selling water, actually on fairly favorable terms, to the Water Bank during the recent drought they made themselves \$26 million, and that money is being used to repair levies and to build water treatment systems and to build distribution systems. Its being used for fish and wildlife, specifically fishery studies. It's being used for a wide range of other things,

and they haven't . . . Oh, and they're also putting part of it into a sinking fund for re-licensing their power plants off in the future. All of which things are beneficial to the citizens of Yuba County and in many regards are beneficial to the livability of the area and certainly the environment.

Yuba County Water Agency provides about half, or an amount equal to half, of the project yield to just the fisheries. They provide water both north and south of the Yuba River for waterfowl, flood the fields; part of it they just put out there. It's pretty cheap for the landowners, and they do it specifically for waterfowl. They get very little credit for those activities. They maintain the Yuba River and maintain the Feather and the Sacramento [rivers] by the releases of water. I think that they should be in a position to use that water for their own economic benefit, *rather* than have it taken away from them just willy-nilly. And I think that that's what's going to happen if they don't take action.

Petershagen: I see. Well, we've been all over the map, just about, in water issues, I think. Now, obviously, a lot of this knowledge you've put together deliberately in the course of your "post-retirement" career, I'll say, as a consultant and as a writer, but a lot of it, I'm sure, almost you've gained by osmosis just from being around people (King chuckles: Most of it I've got by osmosis!) like the regional director and having to answer people's questions and so forth.

King: While I was working for the bureau, on average, I wrote a speech a week for the entire nineteen years.

Petershagen: You took the next question right out of my mouth! So you had to learn *something* to write those speeches, huh?

King: (Laughing) Yes.

Role of a Public Information Officer

Petershagen: What else does the P-I-O [Public Information Officer] do around this place?

King: Well (Chuckles), it's pretty variable. I was fortunate. Only a very few instances did people attempt to dictate what I said or what I told the public. I tried to be circumspect, certainly, and certainly I didn't get on the telephone and criticize the bureau or something like that. But I was pretty much allowed to defend the bureau and its projects with the truth and in a number of instances with my own rationalizations of what was actually happening. I tried to keep those things grounded on the obvious. I always told people that my biggest strength was that I had a keen grasp of the obvious. Generally speaking, I was allowed to go ahead and do that, and I tried always to be available to certainly the news media and to anybody else that called in.

Over time, I became, how should I say, the defender of last resort when somebody had been bounced around from one

telephone to another for most of the afternoon, trying to find out some small thing or something. Just about the time that they've got really hot under the collar and decided they were going to vote Republican next year, then they were transferred to me. And part of my job was to let those folks talk until they ran down, and we could finally get at what they were trying to get to begin with. I never turned anybody away, and I always took that as a kind of a point of pride, that I never turned anybody away. The other side of that was I never felt obligated to give people a satisfying answer. They always got an answer, but not always satisfying. And I have to say that the people I worked for supported that notion and supported me in that. There were a couple that didn't; that's why I'm retired now I guess! (Laughs)

Mentors during Career at Reclamation

Petershagen: I usually try to ask everyone if they could point to someone that they considered a mentor in developing their career. With you, it looks obvious that it must have been Jim Hart.

King: Yeah, I had many, each of whom, for good or ill, contributed to what I was doing in their own way. Hart was a political reporter, and a master at political analysis. I'll never be as good as he was. He was an excellent writer. He wasn't much of a talker, but in his own way he was a truly sensitive human being. He understood what was going on.

The first regional director I worked for, Bob Pafford, was a fascinating individual. In many ways he was an arch-bureaucrat, but Pafford taught me that it's not often possible to know exactly what you want until you've seen what you don't want. And that's the way he proceeded with things.

I learned lessons about loyalty from Mike Catino,¹⁰ to whom loyalty is a very important part of what he was doing, and what he does today, I'm sure. There was a time when I was desperately in need of Mike's loyalty, and he let me go ahead and do things my way when a person with less trust would have cut me off at the pockets. But Mike did not do that, and we came out of it alright. That was one of those instances where I was defending Jim Watt.¹¹ I became a national celebrity for the week, and I never want to do that again! (Laughter)

All of the people I worked for were interesting and I got something out of them that contributed, again for good or ill, to whatever I was or became.

¹⁰ Michael A. Catino served as regional director in Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region from 1981 to 1983. Mr. Catino also participated in Reclamation's oral history project. See, Mike Catino, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, and Donald B. Seney, both of the Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994 to 1995, in Sacramento, California, edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2010, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

¹¹ James G. Watt served as Secretary of the Interior under the Reagan administration from 1981 to 1983.

Petershagen: How large a staff did you have?

King: Let's see, I had a secretary, and I had a lady who ran my education program. I think I'm the only individual in the Bureau of Reclamation that ever created a curriculum for fourth graders, called "Conserving California Resources." Before we were done, it was used all over the world. But when I was P-I-O, I had a lady, Joyce, I forget, who ran that for me and took kids on tours and did lectures and that sort of thing. I had another lady who was a writer for me. That was Carmel Edwards and she may still be with . . . The last time I saw Carmel she was with the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program. And then I had a couple of newspaper clippers that actually belonged—well, they were part-timers for me, and they belonged to the photo lab and that sort of thing. That was my staff.

Newspaper Clipping Service

Newspapers were interesting. I had the largest, and I'm pleased to say, the best clipping service in the Department of the Interior. The Secretaries of Interior, all of them, after I got going, all of them were daily readers of my clipping service.

My news media list was 1,300, there about, 1,500. (Petershagen: Wow.) I used news releases differently than most people do, because I had a list of people that got news releases and speeches and whatever I wanted to send them on top of the press and

radio and T-V releases. And when I really wanted to do it up good, a really big release was 6,000-7,000 units. Normal release for me, unless it was very localized for some reason, but a normal news release for me was 700-900 units. That would go to newspapers and people I thought were interested parties.

Then the clipping service that I ran myself showed me how effective that worked. It also gave me a good insight to what was going on in the communities up and down the state. And in some ways the clipping service itself was a fearful public relations tool, all by itself! (Both chuckle) Because, I don't know, there were maybe 200-250 subscribers to that.

Petershagen: You, I'm sure, in the same vein as the photographers, stumble across interesting people in interesting situations. (King: Oh, yeah.) Joe Dahilig¹² spoke to me about a relationship that he developed with [President] John Kennedy, albeit a little tiny one, very meaningful to him. And you've got a list of names that you brought along. Would you care to . . . Anybody on that list that you want to talk about? Stories that you may have?

¹² Joe C. Dahilig participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, Joe C. Dahilig, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by George F. Petershagen for the Bureau of Reclamation in 1994. Interview edited and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, 2010, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

Floyd Dominy

King: Yeah, when I came to work for the bureau, of course Floyd Dominy was commissioner.¹³ (Chuckles) Interesting individual. Floyd was a hard charger, and he had a reputation throughout the government for being a hard charger and a womanizer and a whole bunch of other things. But Floyd had a capacity for making things move, and if they didn't move when he yelled at them, he'd stand back and kick or push or whatever was necessary to make them move.

And then I remember my first real exposure to Floyd Dominy was with a member of the board of directors of the United Water District—an elderly man, I'm sure he's passed away by now—but Dominy came to town and there was a lot of hoopla. This director's name was Clyde something-or-other. At any rate, he was not too sure that he really was interested in getting too close to this big city bureaucrat that was coming in and making all these waves. And during the dinner party we had for Dominy, why, Clyde and some of his older cronies—remember, this is a man seventy

¹³ Floyd E. Dominy served as Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation from 1959 to 1969. Mr. Dominy also participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, Floyd E. Dominy, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, April 6, 1994, and April 8, 1996, at Bellevue Farm in Boyce, Virginia, edited by Brit Allan Storey, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

years old, *long* time, maybe forever in that little community in the Santa Clara Valley in Ventura County—at any rate, as it turned out, after the dinner, we were taking Dominy back to our district headquarters and he was going to make some pronouncements at a formal meeting and that sort of thing. And as it turned out, Clyde was in the car in the back seat, sitting next to Dominy.

There were three of them back there, and Floyd always took up at least half again the room that he really needed. At any rate, we're going along, and Clyde was getting more and more like he was sucking lemons or something, and he was trying to stay away from Dominy. Finally there was a lull in the conversation and Dominy reached over, Clyde was a tall, skinny old guy, and Dominy give him a mule bite on the leg, and he says, "How the hell are ya', you old son of a bitch? You haven't said anything all night. What the hell's wrong with you?" (Laughter) It was *just* what was needed. It was the first time that I had ever seen that old gentleman really animated. He started talking and shooting the breeze with Dominy, and he was that way all evening long. And that was characteristic of Floyd, he was that kind of person, abrasive as hell, but he could move people.

Gilbert Stamm

The other interesting thing about Floyd was really not Floyd, but his second in

command, Gil Stamm¹⁴—became commissioner—because Floyd would go into some little western town and by the time he left, everybody was upset and all stirred up, but things were starting to move. Usually a couple of days to a week later, Stamm would show up, and Gil was a very calm individual. He'd come from Idaho, I think. He would come in and smooth down all the feelings and say, "Now, now, now, Floyd really didn't mean that." But he always managed to consolidate the gains that Dominy had made when he was there.

And I don't know *how* many times they worked that. Maybe it was something that they did not consciously do, but I know that Stamm very rarely showed up with Dominy. But he always showed up two or three days later, and when he left things would be back, calm, and the farmers, the irrigators, would not be nearly so irritated and Reclamation would have made some gains. And I don't know how many times they did that.

Robert Pafford

Pafford was an interesting individual. When he was selected as regional director here, he was a political compromise. Floyd Dominy wanted, I forget, somebody to be regional director here in California, and Stewart Udall, who was Secretary of the

¹⁴ Gilbert G. Stamm served as Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation from 1973 to 1977.

Interior¹⁵ at that time, wanted somebody else, and the two were at loggerheads. I forget who the assistant secretary was, I think it was Ken Holum. At any rate, he came up with Pafford, and Pafford had been a ranking engineer in the Corps of Engineers in Omaha. So they appointed him, and he took over. And Pafford was a strong-minded individual in his own right. One of the ways he got along with Dominy was by super-aggressive cooperation. He never let Floyd get ahead of him.

I've told you before, he never knew what he wanted until he saw what he didn't want. He, in some ways, was a terror to especially the younger engineers around here, because they would go into a meeting with him, you know, get things all prepared and all laid out and leading to the logical conclusion, and Pafford would just start talking. He'd change his mind in mid-sentence. For most of them it was almost a shattering experience because it had not occurred to them that the last thing that Pafford said was what he wanted. All the rest of it was just thinking out loud and preparatory and leading up to that. So he was an interesting individual. Wore big coke-bottle glasses, everybody thought he was cold. The fact was, he couldn't see! (Chuckles) (Tape turned off momentarily while King reviews his notes.) Oh, okay. Let me see . . .

¹⁵ Stewart L. Udall served as Secretary of the Interior under the Kennedy and Johnson administration from 1961 to 1963.

We were talking about Pafford. Pafford knew, at least parts of the personal and work histories of virtually everybody that worked for him. Most of them didn't know that. I think the only time that I ever felt unsure of myself around Pafford was near the time that he left, retired. I wrote a speech for him, and he read it through and said, "This is just fine. I'll do it just this way," And it scared me to death because he always changed things and he was always right. And when he let something go like that, that, for reasons I'm not sure I understand even today, but I felt that it left me with total responsibility for the effectiveness or the accuracy of that speech. It just shook the hell out of me. (Laughs)

Petershagen: That's great! I have to interrupt you once again, Gerry, to change the tape.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 3.
BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 4.

Petershagen: So Gerry, if you would, please continue with your names list there.

Stewart Udall

King: Well, okay, let's see. Some of the people I haven't mentioned so far: When I went to work for the bureau Stewart Udall was Secretary of the Interior. Udall and Floyd Dominy were . . . I think, a mild description of those two would be "antagonists." It was virtually an unwritten rule that they never showed up on the same stage. Udall was

under Kennedy, and then Johnson at that time was developing his impact on the national, and for that matter world, environmental movement. I wrote a few speeches for Udall, which I'm happy to say that most of them he used. And as far as I know, I'm the first person in the bureau, at least, or this part of the bureau at least, to try to use the term "environmental ethic," which was a term coined by Udall. He understood the meaning, and I *thought* that I understood it. I tried to use it in a speech, I think for, maybe it was for Pafford, I don't know, I'm not sure, but at any rate, when I tried to use it in that speech it was taken out, because nobody could figure out what it meant! (Laughter) And I wasn't adept enough at the time to explain what it meant. I wasn't too sure, anyway. Subsequently it became quite a common phrase, and, as I say, it was originated by Stewart Udall.

Jack Casserly

Later on, Jim Hart hired a guy named Jack Casserly. Jack was a book writer and also a reporter for the *Arizona Republic*. While I was still in the bureau, he left the *Republic* and took, oh, not a sabbatical and not a scholarship, but a fellowship type of thing at Harvard, I believe, and I haven't heard of him since. But Casserly comes to mind because he attended a bureau annual planning meeting. The bureau used to have annual meetings where they get together and kind of hash over the coming year's program and divide up the spoils a little bit. Casserly

was invited in and asked to address the assembled managers of the bureau concerning the bureau's public image and what he thought they ought to do about it.

Petershagen: Is this in Washington, or in Denver?

King: Ah, I think that event was . . . I don't know where it was. It seems to me that it was . . . They used to hold those meetings at different spots. It might have been in Billings or someplace like that. It was out here in the West, maybe it was in Phoenix, I don't know. At any rate, Casserly was there, and he told them that the bureau should pay some more attention to environmentalists and the environmentalist movement and should work a little harder at explaining the value of the Reclamation program. He was listed as being present, but his remarks (Laughs) were not in the program proceedings.

Speech Writing

Let's see, I wrote a speech once for Lyndon Johnson. He didn't give it, but I wrote it. We were going to have Lyndon come out to do one of several ground breakings at Auburn, and it was off again and on again. Then finally Ladybird was going to show up, and that was alright. She could give the speech just as well as Lyndon. But the site of the present overlook building or overlook thing at Auburn was formerly the city of Auburn's corporation yard. And at that time we had a platform

out there where the overlook is now, but there hadn't been a lot of cleanup done, and there were still some tires and junk down below. So the appointed day got closer and closer and you know Jacqueline Kennedy redecorated the White House, and so Ladybird took it on herself to redecorate the nation. And we were very much aware of that situation at the time and what was going on. So there wasn't time. And if we had moved all that stuff, the platform probably would have fallen down. So we painted it green. (Laughter) As it turned out, Ladybird didn't show up. But it was a nice shade of green and it lasted through a couple of rainstorms. (Chuckles)

Impact of Presidential Politics on Reclamation

I mentioned earlier, presidential politics has had its impacts on the bureau. How should I say? (Pause) The Carter administration is a good example. The Carter bunch worked hard at stopping the bureau from doing what it was doing. No more dams, you may remember the so-called "hit list."¹⁶ Auburn was on that list

¹⁶ Jimmy Carter served as President of the United States from 1977 until 1981. Within a few weeks of the beginning of the administration, an internal discussion document accidentally fell into the hands of a reporter. The document proposed cancellation of a number of water projects considered environmentally or economically unsound. This proposal came to be known as Jimmy Carter's "hit list." This happened while Commissioner Daniel P. Beard worked in the Carter administration, and he discussed his perspective on the issue in his Reclamation oral history interviews and in "The Passage of the Central (continued...)

and numbers of other projects that were in various stages of completion.

Then along came Reagan, a western conservative, and he brought in Jim Watt as Secretary of Interior, also a western conservative, and in his own way, Reagan had much the same effect on the Reclamation program as Jimmy Carter had had, only for different reasons. Reagan believed that it was dead wrong for any government agency to propose spending the taxpayer's money, at least out loud. The taxpayers needed to come and ask or demand that the money be spent. So with the advent of the Reagan administration, Reagan in some ways used the same excuses that Carter had used for the bureau not to go ahead. Carter was saying, "The people don't want these things. Therefore, stop doing it." When it came to Reagan, Reagan said, "The people don't want to pay for these things, and that fits with my agenda, therefore, stop doing it." Completely different poles. As a practical matter, this has been going on with virtually every president and with virtually every governor of California.

Lack of Support for Reclamation Projects

I would very, very much hesitate to say,

¹⁶(...continued)

Valley Project Improvement Act, 1991-1992: The Role of George Miller," an Oral History interview by Malca Chall, 1996 for the Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California.

though, that those individuals are responsible for the decline of the Reclamation program—they are *not* responsible for the decline. In my judgement, the responsibility for the decline of the Reclamation program does not lay with its opponents. I think the responsibility lays with it's supporters, or would-be supporters, or people who *should* have supported it and didn't.

Auburn Dam is a perfect example. Auburn is not completely killed off yet, but Auburn did not die because of opposition, it died from lack of support. The local congressmen, Bob Matsui and Vic Fazio have been tearing their hair out for years, trying to get the people here to make up their mind about Auburn. Auburn has a way of getting "voted down," if you will, for the most fallacious of reasons. Last time, it was up in the California State Senate, and it was voted down because "there's an earthquake threat." Well, baloney! (laughs) Auburn Dam would be 6½-7 million yards of roller-compacted concrete, and if there's an earthquake up there, the hole in the ground gets six-and-a-half inches wide. Now, you can't persuade that much concrete to go in a six-and-a-half-inch hole, not with a 6.5 earthquake you can't. But notwithstanding, that was accepted as a good enough reason.

The people in Sacramento knew perfectly well, or had been informed often enough, sooner or later the American and the Sacramento rivers are going to bridge

the levies and the property loss can be somewhere between six and thirty billion dollars. Building Auburn Dam these days would run probably about three billion, so it's a bargain. In the same 100,000 years that you might have an earthquake. And that's just a possibility, there's a probability that there'll be thirty-some, I think it's thirty-seven, floods of approximately the same magnitude as an instantaneous failure would cause.

Those people who know these things and would support Auburn are simply not willing to stand up and take the heat from opponents. If they were, I think history shows conclusively that even modest support for Auburn would carry it. I don't think there's any doubt about it, because it has too much to recommend it. There's enough water in Auburn to save the Delta smelt. You don't have to take that water away from all the farmers in California. But it would cause inundation of some of the American River Canyon, and there are those who are philosophically, adamantly opposed to it for that reason.

Congressman George Miller

Let's see what else we got here. I think Congressman George Miller has had more effect on the entire Reclamation program because of his defense of the Delta and working to use C-V-P to support Delta water quality. I think he has had more impact on the Reclamation program at large than

anyone else certainly in the decade of the '80s, and maybe somewhat longer than that. I think that Miller has engineered changes that are larger in scope.

The last great Reclamation senator was a gentleman from Arizona, who I tried and tried desperately last night to remember his name. He was the Dean of the Senate. He died shortly after he retired, and he was over ninety years old. Do you remember his name?¹⁷

Petershagen: No. [Laughing] That's dirty! You're not supposed to ask me questions!

King: [Laughing] I thought I would . . . The only facility . . . There's a visitors' center, I think, at Glen Canyon Dam, and that is the only Reclamation facility that was named after a living human being. And I think the old gentleman's first name was Carl, but it's not Carl Albert.

Petershagen: Well, let's go on. Maybe it'll come to us.

King: I think that George Miller has had more impact on Reclamation than anyone else since that gentleman, and he triggered (Chuckles) NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act], among other things. He

¹⁷ Mr. King is referring to Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona. After Arizona became a state in 1912, Hayden was elected as its first congressman to serve in the House of Representatives. Hayden was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1926 and represented Arizona there until his retirement in 1969.

triggered [Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson] Scoop Jackson's promoting of NEPA in order to prevent the Bureau of Reclamation from diverting the Lower Snake and much of the Columbia [River] into the Colorado [River].

California Politicians

Let's go on with some of this. Southern California Senator Thomas Kuchel, and, of course, [Harold T. "Bizz" Johnson] Bizz Johnson, Congressman from Roseville. And Bizz was the last of the old guard of Reclamation congressmen. And he tried, actually, right up to the time he died—after he had left the House of Representatives, and [Eugene Chappie] Gene Chappie took over—but Bizz Johnson continually tried to get appropriations and push Auburn ahead. He was responsible for the authorization of Auburn after the Christmas week floods in 1964.

It was those floods that filled Folsom in less than a week, and they would have wiped out Sacramento. They would have done the same thing to Sacramento that the Feather River did to Yuba City, excepting that Folsom was in place. But Johnson got that project authorized, and then spent the rest of his career in Congress trying to get money to actually move ahead with the construction. As a matter of fact, he was largely responsible for over \$100 million that went into construction of the diversion dam and all the explorations of the dam site

and that sort of thing.

I see Scoop Jackson's name here. Remember when he was running for president? We were putting on a groundbreaking or a dedication, dedication I guess, at the outlet of Pacheco Tunnel that goes from San Luis Reservoir over to . . . carries the Santa Clara Valley water. At any rate, we were going to have a celebration over there, and I'm proud to say that I had five presidential candidates all lined up to sit on that platform at the same time. (Petershagen: My goodness!) Every one of them! Scoop Jackson was one of them. Jerry Brown was one . . .

Petershagen: So that would have been in 1960? [King: No.] or '64?

King: No, later than that. It would have been in the '70s.

Petershagen: Still later?

King: Yeah. There was a time when Jerry Brown, Scoop Jackson—who was president? Lyndon Johnson? Just about had to be—Lyndon Johnson. (Pause) I don't remember now, but there were five of them. We were just that close to having five presidential candidates on the same platform for a Reclamation job. (Chuckles) Almost pulled it off.

Let's see. Oh, Clair Engle, another California Senator; responsible for the

Trinity River Division of C-V-P. He's much revered in Redding and much hated in Trinity County.

Don Hodel, who was Secretary of the Interior, sometime General Manager of the Bonneville Power Administration, and who in the midst of the night wrote himself a memorandum which proposed tearing down O'Shaughnessy Dam. Remember that? That was a hoot! (Laughter)

And I see down at the bottom of my list here is the Sierra Club. Over the years, in a lot of ways, the Sierra Club has gotten almost motherly toward Reclamation. I'm sure it would irritate the hell out of them to hear me say that. But today, and for many years now, the heat between the Sierra Club and Reclamation is not anywhere near what it was between the Sierra Club and Floyd Dominy.

David Brower

I'm going to do it to you again. David Brower, the Executive Secretary of the Sierra Club at that time. They finally fired him because he was spending too much money on *New York Times* ads to irritate Dominy. Did you know he's a Roseville boy? Quiet lad, grew up in Roseville. (Petershagen: Interesting.) Yeah. We used to have another Roseville lad, Bruce Kimsey [J. Bruce Kimsey] who was a fisheries biologist and excellent human being. He died of cancer, but he and David Brower

grew up together. Bruce used to tell me that Brower, when he was a young man, was very quiet, very introspective. Bruce used to describe him as a little bit geeky. (Laughter) But he grew up to make the Sierra Club really a national institution. It became under Brower.

Petershagen: Have we come to the end of your agenda?

King: I'm kind of running out of breath here. Probably just as well.

Petershagen: Well, we've gone on for almost three-and-a-half hours now on the tape. We've been together here for almost four hours. I'm sure you're starting to wear out a little bit. But let me just wind this up by thanking you for your cooperation and thank you for participating with us in the Oral History Program.

I need to once again ask you the beginning questions, to have you acknowledge that we did tape record this interview with your permission.

King: Yes indeedy.

Petershagen: And that you have granted this as a gift to the Government of the United States, and it becomes United States property in accordance with the terms of the Deed of Gift that you've signed.

King: Yeah.

Petershagen: And again, thanks very much. It's been a pleasure.

King: Well, good. I hope it's of some modest use somewhere at some time.

Petershagen: I'm sure it will be.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 4.
END OF INTERVIEW